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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN'S MEDIA COVERAGE OF KYRGYZSTAN

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: From the start of the revolt in southern Kyrgyzstan, international media speculated on how events there might affect their rich neighbor in the north. Many international media relied on the Interfax wire service in their reporting, although Interfax sometimes posted uncorroborated and contradictory accounts, particularly regarding Akayev's whereabouts. Kazakhstan's television and print media were relatively slow in publishing reaction, because of a local holiday March 21 and 22, and because some managers ordered news editors in the beginning only to repeat wire service accounts. The first television reports on March 23 highlighted GOK officials' appeals for a peaceful resolution to the crisis and their concern for their neighbor-citizens in Kyrgyzstan. Pro-government media considered the demonstrations unprovoked and hinted that funding from Western NGOs may have played a role in the denouement. Political analysts were split over the effect on Kazakhstan's opposition, which warned that Kazakhstan was next in line for revolution. Initial official reaction from the GOK was mostly subdued and issued off-camera through official statements. President Nazarbayev's assessment on March 25 citing accumulated socio-economic problems, mass poverty and the "weak" Kyrgyz authorities was almost identical the statement from President Putin. END SUMMARY.

TELEVISION COVERAGE GETS A LATE START

2. (SBU) As events in Kyrgyzstan unfolded, the independent Russian wire service Interfax often scooped other media. This was sometimes at the expense of getting corroboration for their reports, such as their contradictory statements on Akayev's whereabouts. Many international media relied on Interfax reporting to augment their own coverage. Kazakhstan's television coverage of the events began only on March 23, in part because of a March 21 and 22 holiday. None of the three nationwide broadcasters - official Kazakhstan 1, pro-government Khabar and centrist Channel 31 - reported the events unfolding to the south on prime time news March 22. A source told emboff that managers at Khabar, which has a correspondent based in Bishkek, ordered news directors to only repeat wire service accounts, and not provide any additional coverage.

3. (U) Television coverage was generally factual, with some editorializing. Prime time news on March 23 focussed on the opening session of Kyrgyzstan's newly elected parliament, efforts to maintain order in Bishkek, and Akayev's declaration that he would not resort to violence to restore order in the "mutinous cities of Dzhalsalabad and Osh" (pro-government, regional Rakhat). Both television and print reports from Ambassador Ordway's press conference that day led with the Ambassador's comments that the U.S. did not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries and wanted a peaceful resolution to the crisis through dialogue. The pro-government daily Ekpress K attributed the following comment to him, which he did not make: "We do not want that situation in Kyrgyzstan to get out of control and develop according to the Ukrainian scenario."

4. (U) In reporting the storming of the White House in Bishkek March 24, Khabar noted that "demonstrations organized by the opposition turned into mass disorder and pogroms" and concluded with a rhetorical question: "Arson, assault, a run on banks, pillaging - is this a victory of democracy?" Kazakhstan 1 similarly characterized the events as "an alarming revolution."

PRO-GOVERNMENT PRESS - UNPROVOKED REBELLION

5. (U) The March 24 official and pro-government papers, issued before the opposition reached Bishkek, considered the rebellion an unprovoked attack on the weak, but well-intentioned Akayev. A page 5 story in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda on March 24 noted that, "independent observers found no serious or obvious violations" in the second round of Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary elections March 13, but the

ruling party's decisive victory "forced opposition forces to aggressive actions - unsanctioned rallies, a massive pogrom, attacks on administrative buildings and institutions, blockades of airports and highways..." The pro-government daily Express K noted on page one, "As we know, he refused to run for a new term in office. However,

today the political situation with our neighbors is so unstable that no political scientists can guarantee Akayev a peaceful departure from his presidential post."

THE PRICE OF REVOLUTION, THE USG ROLE

16. (U) The daily pro-government Liter on page 1 of its March 24 issue said the opposition coaxed participants into demonstrations by offering brandy and 200-300 soms (\$7), which the paper said was a considerable amount of money for the impoverished Kyrgyz people. The pro-government weekly Novoye Pokoleniye published several stories March 25, which dwelt on how the poverty of the population and Akayev's weakness contributed to the popular uprising. From page one: "It's obvious that people live in dire conditions, while the president is accused of robbery and nepotism. This, and the weak will of Akayev, are fully exploited by the opposition forces and by U.S. Ambassador Steven Young, who supported them. By the way, the latter presumably had a big influence on Akayev, because contrary to all agreements with neighboring countries (Security Collective Treaty, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, etc.), U.S. spy planes will be based in Kyrgyzstan." In another piece on page three the author noted, "It's obvious that money came from abroad...It's hard to say how much the disorder in Kyrgyzstan cost, but it's known that help from the West to NGOs bossing the Ukraine around during their third round of elections was \$3 million... Presumably less money was spent in Kyrgyzstan. It should be remarked that power doesn't cost much..."

EFFECT ON KAZAKHSTAN - OPINION SPLIT

17. (U) Daily pro-government Aikyn shared opinions of prominent Kazakhstan political scientists about whether Kazakhstan might be "next." Dos Koshim, president of the Republican Network of Independent Monitors, said, "The situation will definitely have an influence on Kazakhstan, because Kyrgyzstan is not as far away as Georgia and Ukraine... Their protest may be considered an example to local [Kazakhstan] opposition." Political scientist Dosym Satpayev said the influence would come from Islamic extremists crossing from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan. "The influence of Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Islamic organizations is very strong in the south of Kyrgyzstan. These organizations were active in the elections and sided with candidates with whom they could make a deal in the future... The influence will be felt here, first of all, through refugees passing through our territory, including groups with terrorist and extremist intentions. Second, Kazakhstan may suffer economically, because it has investments in some of sectors of the Kyrgyz economy, such as the banking system."

18. (U) Political scientist Murat Laumulin disagreed: "Kazakhstan has a different economic and political situation from Kyrgyzstan... our opposition has no ability to organize a situation similar to the Kyrgyz one." Opposition journalist Sergey Duvanov posted a similar comment on the progressive website, navi.kz: "Our authorities are in a fairly firm position, we have a middle class (certainly by our standards), who are fed by the regime and stabilize a part of society. We also have a weak opposition, that has not up to the present accomplished anything."

KAZAKHSTAN'S OPPOSITION - WE'RE NEXT

19. (U) Warnings from Kazakhstan's opposition to their own government were published March 25 in the opposition weekly Respublika. Opposition presidential candidate Zharmakhan Tuyakbay said, "Disregarding public opinion caused the logical collapse of Akayev's regime, but the situation with parliamentary elections - to be more precise, the obvious vote rigging - is very similar to our September elections. It's high time for authorities to understand a simple truth - that only fair and just elections, when votes are not stolen, can be a guarantor of not repeating similar events here." Communist party leader Serikbolsyn Abdildin said, "I would compare events in Kyrgyzstan with analogical events in Ukraine. In both cases, the votes and the expressed will of the people were boldly stolen... Akayev forced his son and daughter through to parliament, this is

unthinkable! He created an absurd situation and got what he deserved. Let this be a good lesson for dictators of

all suits!"

10. (U) Despite its recent liquidation, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan party published their statement on the opposition website, kub.kz: "The People's Party, Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, congratulates our brothers in the Kyrgyz Republic on their victory... DCK is sure that the Kyrgyz revolution will become the starting point for building a democratic society in Central Asia. The leading role of the people of Kyrgyzstan in this process will remain in history forever. Our hearts are with you - Your today is our tomorrow - Together we will win!"

GOK'S PUBLIC, LOW-KEY RESPONSE

11. (SBU) The first GOK comment on the unfolding revolution was low key, and came from government ministers, rather than the president. In a March 22 statement, Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev said that Kazakhstan was observing the events in Kyrgyzstan with concern, and called on the authorities and the opposition to find a common language and to come to agreement without using force, on the basis of the Kyrgyz constitution. Once the demonstrators had reached Bishkek, Prime Minister Daniyal Akhmetov's appeal to resolve the issues in the "brother state" in accordance with the law appeared on the regional pro-government station Rakhat and the pro-government Almaty municipal station, Yuzhnaya Stolitsa, but not the national stations.

12. (U) Tokayev's reaction to the storming of the White House appeared March 25 on page 2 of the official government daily Kazakhstanskaya Pravda. (Unofficial translation follows). "Firstly, we are tied to this country by traditional and neighborly relations. We sincerely feel what our neighbors are going through. Secondly, further confrontation can have an adverse affect on the socio-economic conditions of citizens in that country. Thirdly, we are concerned for our fellow citizens living in Kyrgyzstan. Events in Kyrgyzstan once again testify to the correctness of policies set by our head of state. Thanks to our political stability and international harmony, Kazakhstan joined the dynamically developing countries in the world, and became an example for our region and all CIS countries..."

AND FINALLY NAZARBAYEV'S ASSESSMENT - WEAK AUTHORITY

13. (U) Interfax posted a statement made by President Nazarbayev at a business forum in Astana on March 25. "It is absolutely obvious that the socio-economic problems that were accumulating in that country for years led to mass poverty and unemployment. This triggered spontaneous protests in many regions of the country. The weakness of the authorities, who were unable to prevent the rioters and vandals from doing whatever they wanted, also played a negative role." None of the television reports that evening included President Nazarbayev's reaction, although Kazakhstan 1 and Khabar did include President Putin's statement, which was almost identical.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: Considering their shared border, history and cultural ties, more prominent coverage in Kazakhstan's media of Kyrgyzstan's revolution might have been expected. However, the subdued reaction from the GOK and pro-government media clearly reflect a concern regarding the potential for spillover into Kazakhstani politics. With his public statement, Nazarbayev appeared to minimize the potential for unrest in Kazakhstan, while laying down a marker that any uprisings would be dealt with forcefully. While it is too early to predict whether the GOK will take additional steps to ensure stability, post certainly expects the pattern of pressure on opposition parties and media to continue. END COMMENT.

15. (U) Dushanbe minimize considered.

Ordway

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